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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Letter dated 29 January 2013 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to refer to General Assembly resolution 60/124, by which the Assembly established the Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to advise the Secretary-General on the use and impact of the Fund. In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 21 of the resolution, I have the honour to transmit herewith a note of the meeting of the CERF Advisory Group, which took place in Geneva on 30 and 31 October 2012.

As summarized in the note, the Advisory Group expressed appreciation for the continuing improvements in the performance and management of the Fund.

The Group considered a number of policy issues, including an update on the management response plan to the five-year evaluation; an analysis of the 2012 reports of the resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators; an update of the CERF risk assessment matrix; a study on the partnerships and cooperation between the CERF secretariat and the evaluation departments of recipient agencies; the Fund's performance and accountability framework country reviews; evaluation of the underfunded emergency window; and the CERF resource mobilization strategy.

The Group also met with members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to discuss the sub-granting and speed of onward disbursement of CERF funds from United Nations agencies and the International Organization for Migration to implementing partners, the review of the underfunded CERF emergency window, and the CERF Performance and Accountability Framework country reviews.

I would be grateful if you would bring the present letter and its annex to the attention of Member States and Observer Missions.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon

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Annex

Note to the Secretary-General on the meeting of the Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund (30 and 31 October 2012)

Recommendations and conclusions

1. The Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/124 to advise the Secretary-General, through the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, on the use and impact of the Fund. The Advisory Group's second meeting of 2012 was held in Geneva on 30 and 31 October, with 15 members participating. The Chair of the Advisory Group, Mikael Lindvall (Sweden), presided over the meeting.

2. The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator provided an update on the use and management of the Fund. The Group met with members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to discuss the sub-granting and speed of onward disbursement of CERF funds from United Nations agencies and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) ("agencies") to implementing partners, the review of the CERF underfunded emergency window and the CERF performance and accountability framework country reviews.

3. The Group considered policy issues, including an update on the management response plan to the five-year evaluation; an analysis of the 2012 resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators reports; an update on the CERF risk assessment matrix; findings from the Philippines performance accountability review; a study on the partnerships and cooperation between the CERF secretariat and the evaluation departments of recipient agencies; the CERF performance and accountability framework country reviews; evaluation of the underfunded emergency window; and the CERF resource mobilization strategy.

4. Further to those discussions, the Advisory Group would like to offer the following findings and recommendations:

Management

5. The Advisory Group expressed its appreciation to the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the CERF secretariat for the use of the Fund in 2012, particularly in regards to the humanitarian crises in the Sahel and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Group recommended the Fund continue to focus primarily on emergency response, while strengthening the linkages with resilience programming. The Group expressed some concern about indications that non-United Nations partners were less engaged than before in discussing CERF priorities. The Group therefore requested the secretariat to work with resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators to ensure that CERF funding requests are the result of consultative processes that, time permitting, include a broad collection of humanitarian actors, including host Governments, agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and implementing partners in the community of non-governance organizations.

6. While noting indications of progress, the Advisory Group strongly encouraged the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the CERF secretariat to continue their efforts to improve the speed of disbursements from United Nations agencies to implementing partners. The Group asked the CERF secretariat to provide evidence to substantiate progress at the next meeting. Members of the Group also encouraged the CERF secretariat to continue efforts to improve the Fund's complementarity with country-based pooled funds managed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, both in the area of planning and allocating funds and the area of monitoring and reporting. The Group noted the progress that agencies were making on their own evaluations of CERF-funded activities and looked forward to receiving the results of those evaluations. The Group also recommended that CERF and recipient agencies continue their efforts to strengthen accountability.

7. The CERF secretariat was recognized as having made progress in implementing the activities in the management response plan to the five-year evaluation, and members requested the secretariat to provide an update on progress at the meeting in the spring of 2013. The Advisory Group encouraged the secretariat to give high priority to implementing the management response plan, while recognizing that input from the agencies is fundamental to the plan's full implementation. Members of the Group also reviewed the updated risk assessment matrix and encouraged its continued development. The Group also requested that CERF share its updated country-specific guidance on prioritization at the next meeting.

8. The Advisory Group reaffirmed its concerns about the percentage of programme support costs retained by the United Nations Controller's office (60 per cent) and CERF (40 per cent). The Group requested the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator to take up this issue with the United Nations Controller as soon as possible.

9. On the issue of the reports of the resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators, the Advisory Group welcomed the improvement in the overall quality and speed in which the most recent reports had been produced and posted. It requested CERF to continue working with agencies to generate feedback on CERF's impact while minimizing the additional reporting requirements for the agencies. Members noted the importance of identifying synergies between the Fund's support for emergency assistance and how it supports other phases of humanitarian relief, recovery and development, for example, the strengthening of national resiliency and the prevention and mitigation of crises. The Group requested the secretariat to monitor the feedback from the agencies on completing the CERF reporting template and to monitor how the template complements the efforts of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to harmonize reporting.

10. The members of the Advisory Group considered the summary of the review of the underfunded window and endorsed its general conclusions. They also took note of the positive comments from the members of Inter-Agency Standing Committee on the conclusions of the review. Members expressed some concern that certain countries repeatedly received funding through this window, and asked the secretariat to monitor this closely. Members also recognized the importance of the Financial Tracking Service to the analysis underpinning the underfunded window and strongly urged donors, agencies and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to ensure that reporting was accurate and up to date, and that the Financial Tracking Service was able to facilitate such reporting.

11. The Advisory Group reviewed the initial draft of the revised strategy for mobilizing resources. It recognized the challenges faced by the Fund in increasing funding levels and expressed concern that a potential decrease in resources could affect the Fund's abilities to respond to the rising needs of crisis-affected countries. The members of the Group agreed on the importance of the broadening of the Fund's donor base in order to ensure a more equitable distribution of funding. The secretariat was encouraged to set ambitious funding targets, employ greater use of public information products that highlight the Fund's added value and increase its visibility, advocate that Governments foster greater private-sector support to CERF within their countries and use the members of the Group to leverage government funding. The Group also encouraged member States and other contributors to convert their pledges into contributions as quickly as possible so that CERF could have a solid funding base early in each calendar year.

Administrative matters

12. Discussions will take place between members and the secretariat to identify the location of the next meeting of the Advisory Group, currently scheduled to be held in the spring of 2013.